



Lost Opportunities in Height

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, December 10, 2007

City Hall Diary

The San Jose City Council received a North San Jose Task Force update last week. North San Jose is a grand opportunity for the city. The prospects are endless: industrial land which adds revenue to the city budget, residential properties to allow people to live close to where they work and an abundance of land which can be used for open space and parks.

Most importantly is the enormous economic engine that we have in North San Jose. The fact that San Jose can make money from this area and use that money to pay for neighborhood services throughout the city is a winner. I have worked with many companies in North San Jose—big companies like Cisco, mid-size companies like Pillar Data, and fast growing start-ups like Wichorus. The variety of businesses located there offers us a great future.

I support the North San Jose plan since it is incremental in nature in that we only do a certain amount of housing and then wait for additional industrial intensification and development. With that said, however, blueprints need to be planned a certain way, which is why the taskforce gave the update that included issues like schools, parks, retail development and so on.

Currently, I have some concerns about the density of the project. As we know, each parcel is precious and once we build on the land then open space is gone forever. For example, most of the current housing being proposed is three stories over underground parking. This design is the norm and not the best use of land. I admit that we did approve one 100-foot-plus building but that has been the exception, not the norm.

I think that taller buildings should be built in North San Jose. I would like to see the City of San Jose and/or the North San Jose Task Force direct the developers to propose taller buildings which would allow for larger parks as I stated in a previous blog. Three stories over parking

is the easy choice for a developer, but taller is better and employs more of our well-trained local construction workers.

In addition, I also think that we should investigate building schools at least three stories high there. School districts should build new schools with density in mind instead of schools sprawling across acreage. Therefore, schools could utilize more of the land for organized play, playgrounds, etc. Also, when it comes to new retail centers, housing should be on top. Strip malls are out; housing over retail is in.

San Jose has been built out of mostly single family homes. There are few places in San Jose really appropriate for tall housing and those are in our downtown and North San Jose.

So let's do density right. If we really want to support transit, jobs and retail, then let's give it our best shot. Otherwise all we end up with is more traffic since lower densities never let you reach that real turning point that we always talk about for our city. We have taken the first steps with high rises in downtown. Let's be sure to include those opportunities in North San Jose.

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